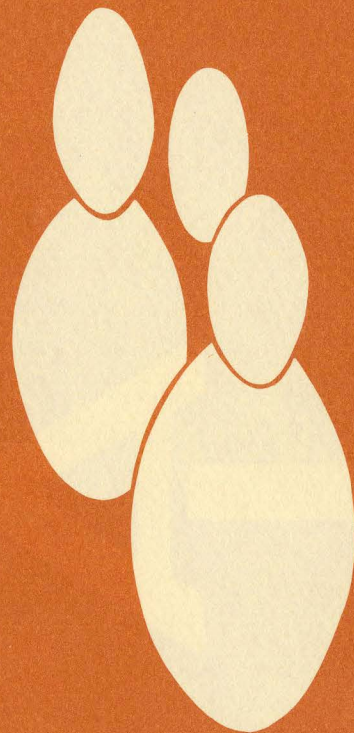


ACTION

IN HOME ECONOMICS

Influencing Youth's Occupational Goals



PARENTAL ROLES

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The study, financed by the Cooperative State Research Service, was carried out by the Department of Child Development and Family Relations of The School of Home Economics, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, in cooperation with the Agricultural Experiment Stations of Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

Influencing Youth's Occupational Goals

PARENTAL ROLES

SARAH M. SHOFFNER
MELDA M. BRANDT

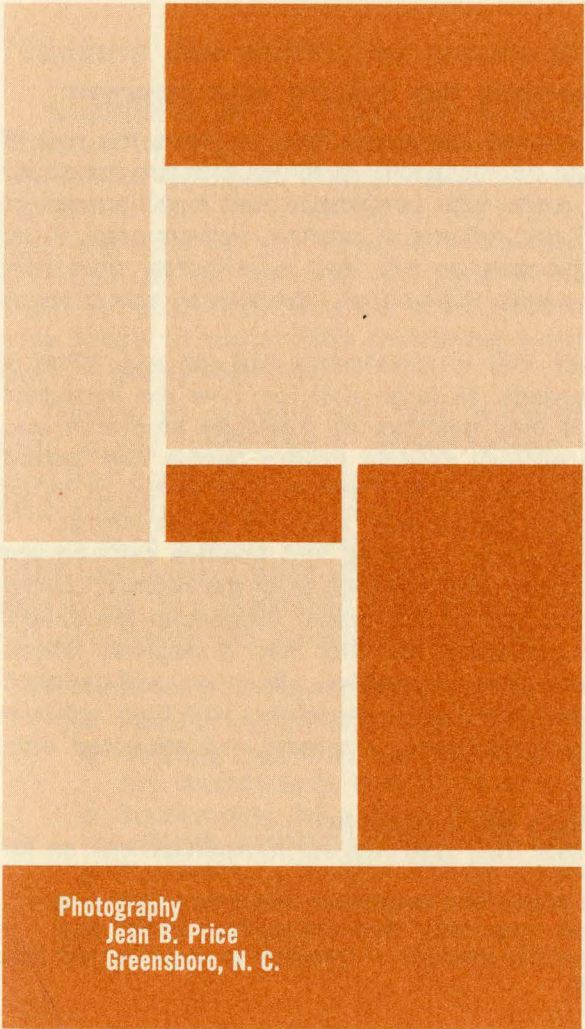
CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	4
SELF-CONCEPT	6
ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION	7
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS	8
EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS	9
OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION	10
POSITIVE ROLE MODELS	12
VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS	13
A CHILD'S INDIVIDUALITY	14
SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS	15
GROUP MEETINGS	16
REFERENCES	18

Overview

The purpose of this booklet is to help parents become aware of how they can help their children improve vocational prospects and make wise and appropriate vocational choices. The content is presented from a synthesized review of the research literature in both vocational guidance and in child development. In addition, this publication incorporates the major findings of a two-phase study designed to determine: (1) the relationship between certain family characteristics and the occupational goals of young people and their mothers' goals for them in rural and urban Negro and rural Appalachian white subcultures; and (2) the effectiveness of one program for bringing about change in mothers' information, attitudes, and aspirations. Results were published in the technical bulletins for seven Experiment Stations of the Southern region. The study included 1412 mother-child pairs who were interviewed separately when the children were in the fifth and sixth grades. When the children were in the seventh and eighth grades, 112 pairs were drawn from the larger sample for an experimental group and 98 for a control group. Standardized questionnaires were administered in interviews before and after application of the experimental program. The experimental program consisted of three, two-hour, structured group-discussion meetings held in consecutive weeks. The meetings were designed to help the mothers understand:

- Their children's unique interests and abilities
- The development of children in the seventh and eighth grades
- The variety of available work opportunities
- The relationship between education and occupations
- The relationship between career possibilities and children's interests
- Their own roles in motivating their children toward planning for careers

An abstract graphic design on the left side of the page, composed of several rectangles in two shades of orange and tan. The rectangles are arranged in a non-uniform, overlapping fashion. A large tan rectangle is on the far left. To its right, there's a smaller orange rectangle at the top, followed by a larger tan rectangle, then a small orange rectangle, and a large orange rectangle at the bottom right. At the very bottom, a wide orange rectangle spans across the width of the design, containing the photographer's credit.

Few parents seem to recognize the full effect they have on their children in vocational development, nor do they recognize how early their influence begins. One's eventual job choice results from a continuous developmental process which begins as early as the preschool years. Parents contribute to vocational development by helping their children develop attitudes and aptitudes that will prepare them to make occupational choices.

Such attitudes include:

- Positive self-concept
- Appropriate achievement motivation

The necessary aptitudes include:

- Skills in interpersonal relations
- Educational and vocational skills required for specific occupations
- Ability to seek out and use occupational information in making job choices

Parents play both direct and indirect roles in vocational development by:

- Serving as role models for the aptitudes and attitudes mentioned above
- Becoming aware of the normal development of children's understanding of occupations
- Helping the child relate his special individuality to the choice of a job that will be appropriate to his abilities and satisfying to him personally

Photography
Jean B. Price
Greensboro, N. C.

Self Concept



PARENTS CAN HELP IMPROVE THE CHILD'S SELF-CONCEPT

How a child feels about himself influences how he views the rest of the world. If he believes he can be successful in things that are important to him, he will approach the world with confidence and a willingness to try new things. Such an attitude reflects a positive self-concept. If he thinks he is not capable of success, he will tend to withdraw from new experiences, and will limit his range of personal, educational, and occupational aspirations.

Parents play an important role in developing self-concept. What a child thinks about himself depends, in large part, on how the important people in his life view him. If they see him as basically enjoyable and competent, he will develop a positive attitude toward people and toward new experiences and responsibilities. If they expect him to fail or to be "bad", he is likely to conform to his parents' negative expectations.

Findings from the research study indicated that positive self-concept in children tended to be associated with attention from the mother. Loving and demanding behavior on the part of the mother influenced the child's self-concept positively, while punishing behavior had a negative effect. Amount of communication also had a positive effect on self-concept. Positive self-concept in children tended to be associated with high achievement motivation, as expressed in academic interests and projected educational goals.

Parents can improve a child's self-concept by:

- Assuring the child that they love him for himself as well as for the things he does
- Teaching him skills which will make him feel more competent
- Allowing him to have responsibilities appropriate to his age
- Permitting him a sensible amount of freedom to explore and test out his competence

PARENTS CAN FOSTER THE CHILD'S MOTIVATION TO ACHIEVE

Selection of an occupation and success in the chosen vocation are influenced by a person's achievement motivation. A person with high achievement motivation willingly takes on new tasks and sets high standards for himself. He is willing to exert considerable effort to attain his goals, and does not give up easily in the face of frustration. Achievement motivation can be observed very early in life, in a child's eagerness to master the tasks of growing up, in his dedication to practicing new skills, in his delight in successfully completing activities like setting the table or putting a puzzle together.

Parents of children with high achievement motivation have been found to use "authoritative" guidance with their children. They take a warm and encouraging interest in their children's activities, and do not make arbitrary or unreasonable demands. But they do maintain standards of excellence that are appropriate to the child's developmental level and consistently enforce these standards. In the present study, too, parents who were loving and demanding were more likely to have children who had high educational and vocational aspirations.

Parents can encourage achievement motivation by:

- Praising a child for his accomplishments.
- Defining clearly for the child what is expected of him and giving him support as he tries to live up to their expectations.
- Encouraging the child's natural curiosity and motivation by providing a variety of experiences and problem-solving situations.
- Expressing a positive attitude toward schooling and helping the child to see the value of schooling in relation to career aspirations.

Achievement Motivation



Interpersonal Relations

PARENTS CAN HELP THE CHILD DEVELOP SKILL IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

An important aspect of occupational success is being able to get along with people. It is important to realize that success in a job depends at least as much on interpersonal skill as on the skills and abilities necessary to perform the job adequately. Skill in interpersonal relations includes a basic attitude of respect for others, ability to communicate effectively, and a sensitivity to the effects of one's behavior on others.

The young child's first interpersonal contacts occur in the home with members of his family. These very early contacts set the stage for further interpersonal learning. If parents interact with the child in a loving and respectful way, he is likely to use similar positive responses in his own interactions with others. If parents ignore the child, or frequently communicate with him in an arbitrary or angry way, he is likely to be cautious, distrustful, or hostile in his approach to others.

Parents can help the child learn skills in interpersonal relations by:

- Treating the child with respect and consideration.
- Talking with him and listening to him.
- Helping him learn the social conventions and skills used in interpersonal communication.
- Pointing out the positive or negative effects of his behavior on other people.
- Giving him opportunity to interact with a variety of people.

PARENTS CAN HELP THE CHILD DEVELOP EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS

Success and flexibility in an occupational role requires mastery of both general intellectual abilities and specific vocational skills. General abilities (e.g., understanding and using language, mathematical and scientific concepts, and general information) are developed both in school and in many informal experiences with people and things. Specific occupational training may include selection of a vocational course in high school, post-high school technical training, a two-year or four-year college program, or graduate education.

In an era when the average American may enter several different occupations during his working life, it is important for parents and children to develop a flexible attitude toward vocational preparation. Children should be encouraged to develop a variety of interests and an attitude toward education as a continuing process that does not end with receiving a certificate. In addition to encouraging the development of a variety of interests and abilities, parents can help the child consider realistic ways in which he can attain his vocational goals. This includes exploring avenues of financial assistance such as loans, grants, scholarships, and on-the-job training.

Parents can help children develop appropriate educational and vocational skills by:

- Providing experiences and play opportunities that help him develop language and problem-solving skills even before he enters school.
- Taking a supportive interest in his school activities and progress.
- Encouraging him to develop a variety of interests through extra-curricular activities, hobbies, or part-time jobs.
- Helping him consider the most appropriate type of training for the vocations he is considering.

Educational and Vocational Skills



UNC-G Infant Care Project



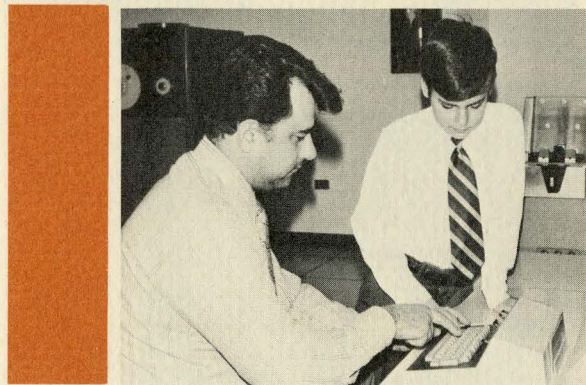
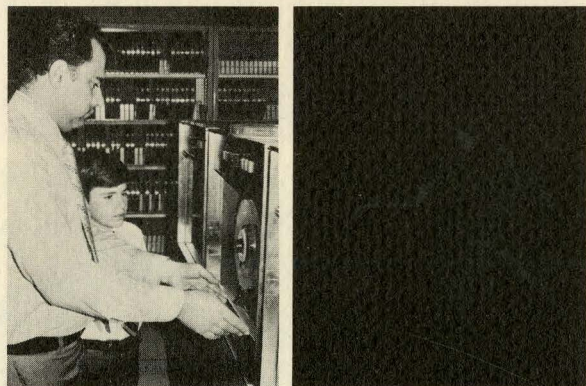
Occupational Information

PARENTS CAN HELP THE CHILD SEEK OUT AND USE OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION

A person needs information about possible job alternatives if he is to make a thoughtful vocational decision. He needs to be familiar with the great variety of "job families" (e.g., health careers, sales careers) and with the specific types of job included in each group. He should know what level of skill or education is required for each job, the expected salary range, and the possibilities for moving into increasingly responsible positions. He should also know something about present and projected openings in the job market — locally and regionally.

The child's first information about occupations comes from exposure to his parents' vocational roles and from observation of "visible" occupations in the community or on television. As the child gets older, parents can expose him to more complete information and to information about less visible jobs, by arranging on-site visits, informal discussions with people in various occupations, or by providing books or pamphlets about different jobs. Schools and local industries also frequently provide informational programs for junior high and high school students and their parents.

In the study reported here, mothers' information about possible careers for their children increased after attending three meetings that focused on guiding the educational and vocational interests of children. Mothers also reported more communication within the family on these topics after participating in the meetings. Many more children whose mothers attended the meetings than children whose mothers had not participated reported considering schooling in relation to jobs.





Parents can help their children find and use occupational information by:

- Exposing their children (beginning even before the school years) to books which present accurate information about various jobs.
- Giving their children as many opportunities as possible to observe people in different occupations.
- Encouraging their children to have some work experience through voluntary jobs, home responsibilities, or part-time work.
- Attending informational programs sponsored by industry or schools and discussing with their children the information presented.



ARE YOU A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL?

The preceding sections have given a number of suggestions of things parents can do to facilitate their children's occupational development. However, one of the most important contributions parents make to their children's development is through their role as models of the attitudes and aptitudes previously mentioned. Parents who feel positively about themselves and who approach new experiences with confidence provide a positive example for their children. So, also, do parents who are able to cope constructively with frustration and challenges and who take satisfaction in a job well done.

Parents also serve as role models for the development of interpersonal skills by conveying to the children their own attitude of respect toward other people as individuals. Children are likely to learn appropriate social conventions and positive social behaviors easily and naturally if they see these behaviors in their parents. Parents can also model positive attitudes toward education and work. A parent who is interested in learning new things, reading, and expressing himself creatively in work and recreation, is likely to inspire similar attitudes in his children. It is very important to realize that children learn many behaviors and attitudes through imitation, and parents are the earliest and most potent models.

ARE YOU AWARE OF THE VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS?

Parents may be better able to help in the vocational process if they understand that children's thinking about occupations progresses through a series of stages. From the preschool years until about 11 years of age, subjective considerations lead the child to rapidly shift his vocational interests. Young children frequently think they would like to become policemen, firemen, or construction workers — occupations they observe as they learn about their community. Older children may choose a variety of somewhat dramatic occupations they read about in books or see on television — such as detective, doctor, or astronaut. The "choices" a child makes during this early period have little direct relation to his eventual occupational decision, even if he later chooses one of the jobs originally considered. Understanding this, parents can accept these early choices and use them to expand the child's understanding of the world of work.

At about 11 years of age, children begin to consider various occupations more seriously. In the early phase, they think mainly in terms of their interests in various areas. They later begin to integrate these interests with considerations of their ability and with their motivation to pursue the type of training necessary for various occupations. Still later, they begin to relate their own personal values to the selection of a job within an area of interest. It is most important during these searching years for young people to have thoughtful and sensitive guidance—especially from parents.

Toward the end of high school, young people narrow the range of possible choices and prepare to make a decision that leads them directly into a job or into a specialized or general educational program. Even after a young person has made such a decision, it is important for parents to maintain a sincere interest in his vocational development, and to offer support and encouragement in times of uncertainty.





DO YOU APPRECIATE YOUR CHILD'S UNIQUE INDIVIDUALITY?

It is important for parents, counselors, and young people to realize that a person will derive most satisfaction from a job if that job is suited to his unique individuality. Different persons feel differently about work — some like working with things, others enjoy work with people or animals, still others prefer working with ideas. Of course, almost all jobs involve all three aspects to some degree, but different occupations primarily emphasize one or another of these aspects.

A parent or counselor can help a young person consider whether his temperament is most suited to outdoor, mechanical, computational, scientific, persuasive, artistic, literary, musical, social service, clerical, or other activities.

If parents understand and accept their child's individuality, it is frequently possible to avoid a conflict between parental expectations and the child's interests and aspirations. It is possible that parents' expectations for the child are not compatible with the child's individual temperament. For example, parents may expect the child to enter the father's construction business, when the child would really prefer a job involving more contact with people. If parents enjoy and appreciate each child's individuality, they are less likely to be rigid in their aspirations and expectations for their children. Such openmindedness may increase meaningful parent-child communication and make the decision process less stressful for the child.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS¹

One research question guiding the study could be stated: What are the level and nature of ambition and motivation to achieve among youth in three low-income groups, and what factors are related to varying degrees of ambition?

Results showed that the occupational aspirations of the 1412 youth studied were about as high as those of other youth from all levels of living. Thus, being from a low-income group did not seem to markedly depress aspirations. Similarly, more than half the children aspired to education beyond the high school level. Boys and girls were dissimilar in occupational aspiration in that boys gave a wider range of job choices than did the girls. Rural youth had significantly lower aspirations than did urban youth. Girls planned to achieve higher educational levels than did boys.

Mothers tended to project lower aspirations than did their offspring; however, both mothers and children were oriented toward professional, technical, or managerial level careers. Mothers tended to project higher occupational and educational aspirations for sons than for daughters.

A second research question was: To what extent may the career thinking and planning of children and parents be influenced by group sessions with the mothers? Experience with the group meetings planned

¹Full description of the entire study including findings and implications is found in **Information Series I** (See References, page 18).



Group Meetings



for mothers revealed that several areas related to vocational development were influenced by the intervention programs. Changes included increases in mother-child communication about career planning, children's consideration of various jobs and careers, information about jobs, and development of more realistic aspiration-expectation levels. These results have implications for parents, teachers, and family life educators.²

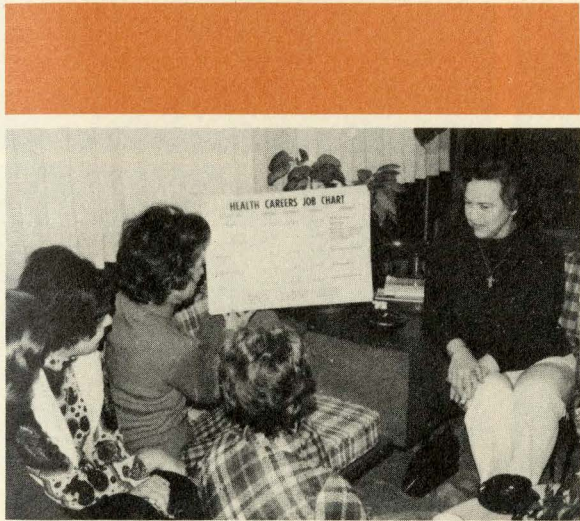
● MOTHER-CHILD COMMUNICATION

Mothers talked more to their children about jobs and career planning after attending the group meetings. The atmosphere created through group meetings for mothers, fathers, or both parents can have the effect of increasing parent-child communication in regard to career planning. One may reasonably assume that an outcome of increased mother-child communication would be a clearer perception by the child of his parents' aspirations for him, and a clearer perception by the parents of the child's ideas and plans in the worlds of work and education. This improved communication will be an effective reinforcer to the child's motivation to achieve.

● THINKING ABOUT JOBS

Children more frequently thought about jobs and career planning, as an indirect result of their mothers having attended the group meetings. Perhaps an even larger increase in the amount of thought given to vocational planning would be found if similar sessions were provided for parents and children together.

²Full description of this phase of the study may be found in **Program Plans for Group Meetings, Information Series II**, (See References, page 18).



● GAIN IN INFORMATION

In all the groups studied, both mothers and children were found to have increased their knowledge of job information. Mother-child pairs in the experimental group who attended the three meetings increased their job information nearly five percent. Knowledge of job information for mother-child pairs in the control group who did not participate in the meetings increased very little (1.5 percent). Mothers in the rural Negro group showed the largest gain (12 percent) in job information. This finding implies that programs such as the ones used in this study will be especially beneficial to rural blacks.

● OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Children whose mothers participated in the group meetings tended to be more realistic in stating their occupational aspirations and expectations than children of mothers who did not attend the group meetings. The distance between aspirations and expectations was less for the children in the experimental group than for children in the control group. If this decrease is taken as evidence of a more realistic view of occupational choices, then it can be said that group meetings promoted realistic thinking.

Mothers reported some beneficial outcomes from the three group meetings which could not be measured with the tests used in the study. In the evaluation reports the mothers told how pleased they were to participate and discuss topics they had never had an opportunity to discuss before. Mothers' reports, observation records of the three meetings, and implications from the findings of other studies point to areas of emphasis for anyone concerned with influencing occupational goals of young people:

- Develop rapport between parents, children, and counselors in an understanding atmosphere.
- Foster mutual interchange of ideas and feelings between family members and educators.
- Teach the importance of encouraging children in the early years, observing children to find out their special interests and encouraging their interests once they are known.
- Help children improve their self-image.
- Suggest ways to give children opportunities for making educational and occupational choices
- Cooperate with school counselors and parent educators in administering programs having to do with educational and occupational planning.

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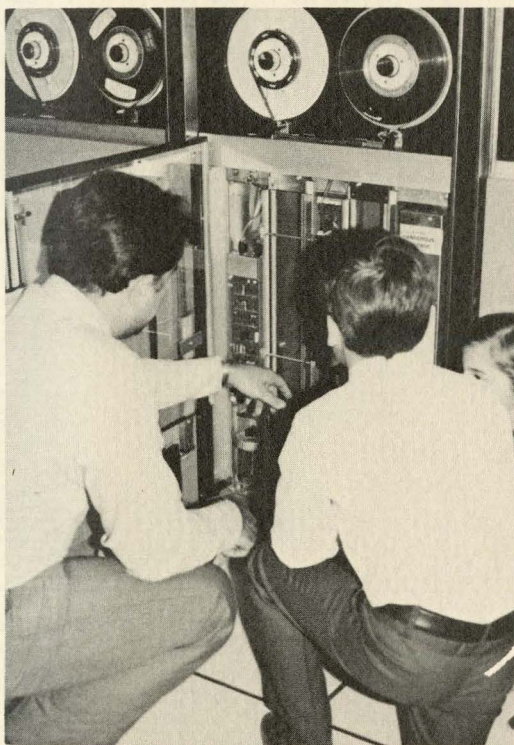
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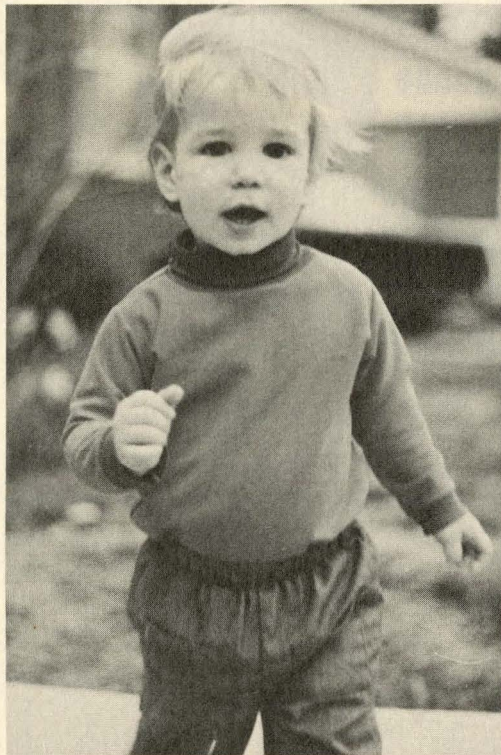
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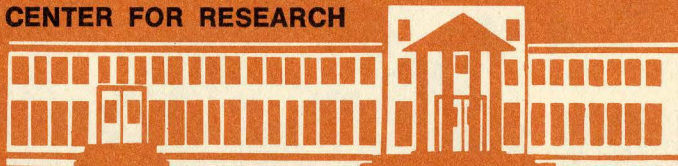


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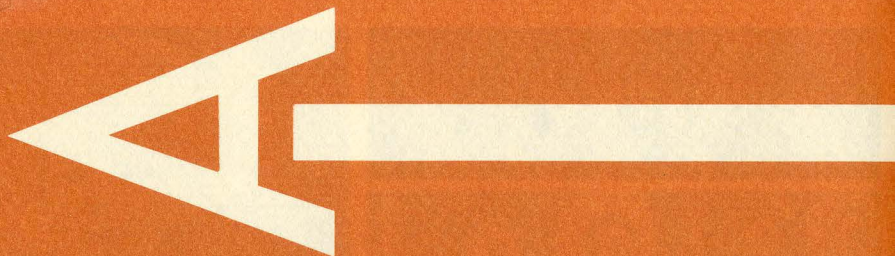
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